

## Editorial Comment by the Massachusetts Commission on the Status of Women

April 13, 2007

The Massachusetts Commission on the Status of Women stands with all women across the Commonwealth in public condemnation of the remarks of shock talk master Don Imus and his sports producer Bernard McGuirk which unjustly demeaned the Rutgers women's basketball team. The incident that sparked national outrage was not isolated. It was part of a program that for years has by design served up misogynistic and racist banter under the guise of comedy on a daily basis. But, there is no humor in deliberately outrageous remarks that serve only to perpetuate stereotypes and foster disrespect in our society.

Ratings and revenues have trumped civility and respect for too long. Complaints have fallen on deaf ears until now...until this incident. Perhaps that is due to the fact that the Rutgers young women were defenseless to the personal attack and the slurs-for-laughs were so far out of bounds. They were not part of the parade of Congressmen, broadcast newsmen and commentators, celebrities, authors and even would-be Presidents who voluntarily subjected themselves to this program but were self-servingly silent about its content...until now. CBS and MSNBC have cancelled the offending program after nervous sponsors helped them see the light. These same corporate sponsors did not see the light themselves until the public finally voiced its outrage. This is a case where loss of revenues trumped ratings.

This incident robbed the Rutgers team, their coaches and their parents of the positive recognition they have earned and deserve for their accomplishments on and off the basketball court. That is truly regrettable and even sincerest apologies are inadequate.

But, the Commission is hopeful that this incident will serve a lasting good if it is a true tipping point... the moment at which the public finally said a collective "no!" to anyone, man or woman, who uses the public airways to purposely demean and denigrate any individual or group. Thoughtlessly disparaging a person's appearance, recklessly injuring someone's reputation, or willfully causing women to be objects of derision and disrespect to generate cheap laughs, shocking lyrics or provocative commentary should not be acceptable in any venue. It is not harmless. We are all paying the price as its insidious effect undermines our society.

The problem is not one radio or TV program. The problem is the way women and minority

groups have been marginalized and diminished across the music, radio and broadcast industries to generate profit for far, far too long. The problem is that we have allowed hateful, shocking and outrageous speech to increase unabated until it has become accepted as a form of entertainment.

In the final analysis it is the public who will ultimately decide whether this speech and behavior will be accepted or rejected. The Commission calls on every citizen of the Commonwealth to speak out whenever and wherever this behavior and this speech emerges. Reject it in the music industry. Reject it on the radio. Reject it on television. Words have the power to destroy and to inspire. Words have the power to divide and to unite. It's time we all demand more than we are getting from industries that are squandering the power we give them and our nation's future for profit. It's time to turn up the volume to turn off the hate.